



Afghanistan: Evolving an Indo-Pak Strategy Perspectives from Pakistan

Salma Malik

Lecturer, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad

The security dynamics of Afghanistan, Pakistan and India remain intractably interlinked. Given their shared histories, shared borders and shared ethnicities, any political and strategic development in any one of these countries finds resonance in the other two. Five years of Taliban regime in Afghanistan, not only spelled gross human rights violations and miseries for the Afghan people, but its linkage to the Al Qaeda and 9/11 terror attacks initiated the US led global war on terror. This global effort has drastically impacted and shaped the world politics in the last nine years. Pakistan owing to its links with the Mujahideen and then Taliban militia was also served the ultimatum of either joining the US alliance partnership or else face drastic consequences. As a result, Pakistan joined the global war, and short of allowing space for physical incursions into and from Pakistani territory, it committed to assistance at logistical as well as material level.

A major negative consequence of this Non-NATO Alliance partnership, as coined by the US, was a spilling over of miscreants and terrorist elements into the frontier tribal areas of Pakistan as viable safe

havens, and setting up their operations from those areas. Gradually Pakistan also got inextricably embroiled in fighting terrorism and militancy, as the insurgency spread from tribal into settled areas and a spate of suicide bombing countrywide caused a major security dilemma for the country. Given that insurgency can not be curbed through traditional militaristic means, the government launched various operations, latest of these being Operation Rah-e-Raast to reclaim settled areas of Swat and pre-empt a major humanitarian crisis in the shape of massive exodus of internally displaced persons of the affected valley. Though successful to a large extent, as yet the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) is not completely rid off terrorist elements, mainly (Afghan or Pakistani) Taliban and Al Qaeda leadership, which are still believed to be hiding in these areas, if now dispersed and not as fortified than before.

In the eight years that followed, the US policies under Bush administration made it thoroughly unpopular, especially in the Muslim world; the Democrat administration under Barack Obama tried to indulge in major damage control, and one part of the appeasement strategy was the announcement of phased withdrawal from Iraq. While the second most significant and important decision was the announcement of policy review on Afghanistan – the Af-Pak Strategy, announced in 2009.



Indo-Pak dialogue on Conflict Resolution and Peace Building is an ongoing project of the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi.

As a part of this project, the Institute is publishing a series of background papers on various Indo-Pak bilateral issues. Besides, the Institute is also organizing track-II dialogue between the two countries in October 2009. For more information about this project, kindly visit IPCS website.

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ISSUES/PROBLEMS IN INDO-PAK COOPERATION IN AFGHANISTAN

The March 2009 Af-Pak Strategy or the White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group's Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan was based on five broad goals.

- Disrupting terrorists networks inside Afghanistan and Pakistan so to degrade and shrink space available to the terrorists
- Promote better, effective and sustainable governance opportunities in Pakistan.

- Strengthening security and law enforcement forces in Afghanistan to make them self reliant and be able to independently initiate and execute counter terrorism and counter insurgency operations,
- Try and bridge the crucial trust deficit shared independently by both countries with regards the US by promoting democracy, economic and political stability.
- Achieving these goals through the active involvement of the international community.

On the same lines, the administration's recently circulated Draft Metrics for Progress also spelled out in nuanced vernacular, the future policy options, regardless of the troop's deployment and specified time lines. Namely, disrupting of terrorist networks both inside Afghanistan as well as Pakistan, secondly supporting stability in Pakistan and lastly, strengthening and developing Afghan security forces, harnessing international support for the effort and lastly, a capable, strong, transparent, accountable and politically legitimate popular Afghan government.

Ambassador Richard Holbrooke was appointed as the special envoy of US to Pakistan and Afghanistan; he has made repeated trips to the region, including Delhi as well, and in the six months since the unfolding of the new policy. Not much has changed. The recently concluded Afghan elections are being widely condemned as being rigged, and reminiscent of the elections American administration of the time, had engineered in Vietnam. This has of course cast a negative impact on the future course of governance in the country, plus the indigenous Afghan forces, whether the Army or police, still remain miserably lacking in their skills and ability to tackle thorny issues such as drug and land mafia, increasing crime, pressure from the splinter Al Qaeda-Taliban groups.

With regards Pakistan, neither the issue of cross border infiltration, a concern raised by both countries at their own terms has been completely dealt with, nor have the militants and terrorists elements completely been checked from their operations. In fact, the situation becomes extremely complex in the face of foreign militants and insurgents, external actors (state as well as non state) which given their own agenda are fuelling the militancy through money, infiltration of arms as well as ideological

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indoctrination encouraging these elements to operate cross border. Then there are Pakistani Taliban and more difficult to pinpoint are sleeper elements, present in the shape of ideological or political supporters.

Secondly, the trafficking of contra-band as well as food items, free flow of weapons, drugs, terrorist operators and cross border incursions have become an extreme sour point in the relation of both the neighbours. The very fact, that the 2640 kilometre long Durand line is selectively considered an international boundary only exacerbates the dilemma. Vis a vis allied operations inside Pakistan, there have been serious reservations and protest from all quarters with regards the drone attacks.

In spite of the military aid sanctioned for the Af-Pak operations, not only is there a significant trust deficit and suspicion with regards the US, the general feeling initially shared by Pakistani public was that post-9/11 Pakistan's ruling junta played into American hands, in order to seek international legitimacy and support. And as such, Pakistan is supporting and fighting America's war, a world power which will discard Pakistan once the purpose has been fulfilled. Regardless of the conditional aide package, the expansion of US diplomatic mission in Pakistan, the long simmering issue of extra-ordinary rendition and missing persons, coupled with detainees at the Guantanamo bay prison has only heightened the ill-will towards US.

The significance of US as a regional and in Pakistan's case next door neighbour for an indefinite time period is enormous. For Pakistan, it is a second time in its contemporary history to have a global power in its neighbourhood, first Soviets during the decade of 1980s, and now the United States. The dynamics of the time, helped Pakistan fight the last battle of Cold war as a favoured proxy, but not without drastic strategic consequences. However for India, an aspirant from regional to great power status, then and even now, Afghanistan is a regional neighbour whose problems should be dealt at a regional level. In spite of being a Soviet friend, India was vocal in protesting against Soviet occupation, and in the current phase, if seen from Pakistan's perspective, India is grooming itself as the most viable alternative to the US and allied forces, once they withdraw from Afghanistan. Although this may not be possible in the near future, but the massive amount of rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts, to the tune of US \$ 1.2 billion, and close ties with Afghan ruling elite is an enormous source of discomfort for Pakistan.

Even prior to the Soviet occupation, Pak-Afghan relations remained thorny, largely owing to the Durand line and then Pushtoonistan claim, which Pakistan generally blamed as instigated by India. In the current circumstances, New Delhi's growing interests in Kabul, perceived sponsoring of anti-Pakistan factions of Northern alliance, are at askance with Pakistan's quest for the elusive strategic depth which is part of its security outlook. With regards, India similar issues, at times state, and in certain incident Non-state actors' involvement in cross border terrorism and Pakistan's support to

Kashmir movement, has only increased the disconnectors between the two countries. As a result, the composite dialogue process between the two countries has reached a stand still which is also a major cause of concern to the US, which is now an important stake holder in the regional stability dynamics.

India's role as an important stakeholder has time and again been acknowledged, highlighted and accepted by the US. Likewise, New Delhi is also very keenly participating and observing the developments on the Pak – Afghan front. However India distanced itself when the Obama administration spelled out the joint Af-Pak strategy, by raising severe reservations that it did not want to get bracketed with fragile or failing states. Is India interested in a proactive military role? For the moment, New Delhi has not made its intentions clear, but what is obvious is that given India's traditional Nehruvian mindset that South Asia is its extended domain, with little space for regional or extra-regional actors to assert their power in regional politics, stands true today as well. With regards being bracketed in the same index as Afghanistan was looked upon by Pakistan with a lot of reservations, however, given the commonalities and shared challenges, the term "Af-Pak" has gradually been accepted in the Pakistani strategic lexicon, albeit with a pinch of salt.

Terrorism as an issue, also affects Pakistan-Afghanistan relations and bilateral as well as trilateral for a such as the Amaan jirga or the US-Pakistan and Afghanistan forum are existing structures which can be better exploited and used. Another important, yet thorny issue which all three neighbours complain to each other is the intervention and instigation of non-state elements as proxies to destabilise each other. Pakistan's premier intelligence agency ISI has in the recent years come under enormous scrutiny for its role in promotion of Jihad and religious extremism. Likewise, similar complaints have been made from the Pakistani side that India's RAW has been an active factor initially in the Karachi unrest of 1980s, which led to separatist conflict in this mega port city, and now is instigating ultra nationalist elements in Balochistan. In fact the passage of the tabled Kerry-Lugar coupled with Barman Bill in the US legislature remains conditional and seeks guarantees from Islamabad for non-interference in the neighboring politics. However, it carries no similar provisions vis-à-vis the regional neighbours.

II

THE ROAD AHEAD: OVERCOMING THE PROBLEMS

The biggest impediment in the triangular relation is the varying degrees of human development and capacity building in the three countries. Where democracy but for a limited phase in the 1970s has never been breached in India, Pakistan has had to face, repeated military takeovers, and Afghanistan remains a classic transitional state, which exhibits traces of conflict past and present.

In order to realise the first goal, of countering and eradicating terrorism, a problem shared by all three

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countries, there is a need for adequate capacity building. Unfortunately, in the case of India and Pakistan, given the intractable Kashmir conflict, terrorism is a relatively obscure term; both countries accuse each other of state sponsored terrorism, but in a different contextual framework. Both India and Pakistan not only share a joint terrorism mechanism with each other, which entails mutual and bilateral cooperation at various levels, but also sharing critical intelligence, which may be of mutual benefit to both. Secondly, under SAARC's regional framework, not only these two, but now Afghanistan as well is signatory to regional protocols. Unfortunately, the SAARC is not taken seriously, and remains hostage to Indo-Pak bilateral conflicts. There are pre-existing arrangements in place between Afghanistan and Pakistan, but the will to implement that is the main impediment. At the practical level, all three countries have been fighting their own domestic battles against terrorism. In case of India and Pakistan the law enforcement as well as military and Para military forces have been involved in fighting this menace. In case of Afghanistan, it is primarily the US led ISAF effort, with a parallel attempt to develop and strengthen Afghan army and police forces that is tasked to carryout anti-terrorist operations.

To prevent cross border infiltration, stringent controls across the Durand line is required. Unlike the past, there is sufficient will though tacit, in Afghanistan to recognise the Durand Line as the international border between the two countries. Pakistan has already been trying to bring the Afghans on board, and it would actually be of greater significance that the contentious status of this border is now removed once and for all. Ironically, during the Soviet invasion and later as well, Durand line has been selectively recognised as the international border, especially from the Afghan side, so with sufficient political backing; it would be strategically suitable to confirm its status.

At the domestic level, not only is there a need to build, train, develop and strengthen military and law enforcement agencies to counter terrorism and counter insurgency operations, or what can be termed as operations other than war, but most importantly there is a need to revamp, train and adequately equip justice system. for this purpose, not only, there is a lot being done by international donor agencies and actors, but the most effective would be to share regional best practices, without any prejudice and biases, as these measures would not

only be most viable, practical but also sustainable. There could be possible joint training exercises, and intelligence sharing. However, given the complex security dynamics, such cooperative measures remain elusive.

With regards, capacity building, most important is gaining local ownership and support both at individual as well as regional level.

Secondly, strengthening and supporting a stable Pakistan. Owing to the warped civil military relations, and regional dynamics, democracy as a sustained process has more or less remained elusive in Pakistan's case. Ironically, in the three major military takeovers, the quest for legitimacy always found a friendly audience in the West, which owing to its Cold war and then post 9/11 strategic interest was seeking allies. The coinciding interests, meant sufficient military aide, though if seen from recipient perspective, during the 1950s it was dumping of redundant weapons systems, in the 1980s it was Afghanistan specific, though with sufficient space for leakage and post 9/11 highly conditional to a stringent performance metrics. But military regimes have been more suitable to US interests. The foremost need is to invest in, support and help build and strengthen democratic political forces and institutions. Also promotion of better governance is an important goal.

The third aspect of promoting transparency, governance, accountability and strengthening of security sector vis a vis Afghanistan, is again very important, as any significant to major unrest and instability has a direct consequence cross border. Both India and Pakistan have been involved in Afghan rehab, refugee repatriation as well as reconstruction activities. It would be better if they are also considered partners in long term solution. Both the countries also need to understand and acknowledge the other's interest in Afghanistan. If India seeks an active share in Afghan pie, then New Delhi must also acknowledge that its presence in Afghanistan heightens Pakistan's security dilemma, specially given that Pakistan has always considered Afghanistan as its "strategic depth" while spelling its strategic outlook. The question remains that neither Pakistan, nor India would ever remain at ease with the other's over engagement and investment in Afghan affairs, as invariably it is considered contrary to their national interests.

Combining the last two points, the region has had its fair share of external involvement already; rather it suffers from a classic over dose. The question is Do we need more proactive involvement? Whether in the shape of US as a strategic ally, partner, friends of Pakistan mulling over economic bailout packages, or a donors rush into rebuilding Afghanistan on their own terms. Too much external support leaves little space for harnessing internal support mechanisms, which are most critical. With regards trust deficit, a lot of lost ground was covered with Secretary Clinton's admission, that US was largely responsible for the rise of extremism and terrorism in the region, by promoting jihad during the 1980s. it is an uphill task, and less collateral damage attributed to the drones

and redressal of flawed policies of the previous US administration can certainly be helpful.

III RECOMMENDATIONS

India and Pakistan should undertake the following:

- Strengthen and cultivate pre-existent infrastructures and institutional mechanisms, than invest in new (yet similar) structures.
- Reinitiate the CDP, without further pre-conditions, and try to ink agreements on near resolved issues such as Siachen, Sir Creek for enforcing confidence between the two states.
- SSR is being carried out piecemeal in the two countries, at times driven by donor interest; however the need is to institutionalise security sector and justice development and reforms, at domestic, bilateral and regional level.
- Review security and strategic outlook, for future regional stability. An ideal goal, but very critical for the future benefit of the countries concerned.
- In this capacity, blame gaming as well as policy of seeking strategic depth and proxies needs to be critically reviewed.
- Mutual engagement and demands such as non-intervention and interference needs to be reciprocal, or else, this unhealthy trend would continue.
- Learn from each other, and build local solutions to local problems, a most critical element.
- For India, vis a vis Pakistan, it needs to engage with democratic political forces a lot more than remaining focused on military as the main actor.
- Terrorism as a policy option needs to be discarded as it is highly counter productive.
- Both governments need to realise that investment in peace and future stability is most important, as they share their present and future together.
- Promoting bilateral, as well as trilateral initiatives such as energy pipelines and corridors would not only help overcome mutually faced energy crisis, but also be an enormous bridge building exercise.



**INSTITUTE OF PEACE AND
CONFLICT STUDIES**

B-7/3, Safdarjung Enclave, New
Delhi, India, 110029
Tel: 91-11-4100 1900